

**A PERFECT CASE?  
EMIL JENSEN  
IN THE MEDIUMSHIP OF  
INDRIDI INDRIDASON,  
THE FIRE IN COPENHAGEN  
ON NOVEMBER 24TH 1905  
AND THE DISCOVERY OF  
JENSEN'S IDENTITY**

by

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*ABSTRACT*

At a séance with Indridi Indridason in Reykjavik on November 24th 1905 a Danish communicator appeared who gave his name as 'Jensen' and his profession as a 'manufacturer'. He described a fire that had broken out in a factory in Copenhagen. About an hour later he said that the fire had been brought under control. A written account was deposited with the Bishop of Iceland. There was no telephone or telegraph communication with Iceland in 1905 and news arrived by ship near Christmas that a fire had indeed broken out on November 24th in a factory at Store Kongensgade 63, and was brought under control in an hour as had been stated at the séance.

Minute books were kept of Indridason's séances which took place from 1904 to 1909. They had been lost for over half a century when two of them turned up a few years ago. According to them on December 11th 1905 the communicator revealed his name to be Emil Jensen, claimed that he was unmarried and had no children, had died when 'not so young', and had brothers and sisters who were all still living. No attempt was made to trace manufacturer Jensen until the author did so in 2009. A search by the author in archives in Denmark revealed the existence of a person named Emil Jensen who had been a manufacturer and had lived most of his life on Store Kongensgade where the fire broke out. Everything that the communicator had stated about himself in 1905 was thus verified over a century after the sittings took place. This case has a striking similarity to the famous case of Emanuel Swedenborg, who described while in Gothenburg in 1759 a fire that raged near his home in Stockholm.

## INTRODUCTION

Frederic Myers was indirectly responsible for psychical research and the rise of spiritualism in Iceland. Einar Hjörleifsson Kvaran, a prominent writer and editor, read of Myers's *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* when it was reviewed shortly after it was published. The review was by the Editor of the prestigious *Review of Reviews*, W. Stead, who each month would report on his "book of the month". In the March issue Stead wrote of *Human Personality* that it was more than just a book of the month, more even than a book of the year, but the book of the period. Kvaran was so impressed by this testimonial that he persuaded his library to buy the expensive two volumes and read them with great interest.

He was eager to experiment and gathered together a sitter group (probably the first in the country). They sat in a circle with their fingertips resting on a small table, and at first nothing happened, but then some minor table movements took place. The sitters developed a method of getting 'yes' and 'no' responses through these movements. Once they asked if any of them had a gift of automatic writing; the answer was 'yes', and a girl sitting at the table was identified who was able to write a sentence or two in this way, and more several sittings later. Some of text made sense and was verifiable, but she also wrote about the death of a relative who turned out to be alive and well (Kvaran, 1906). Kvaran continued despite such failures and grew increasingly aware of the pitfalls of this line of research.

Indridi Einarsson became interested in the sittings, as did his wife, and they began to sit with the group. Once when she sat at a table in their home Mrs Einarsson invited a young relative of her husband's to join. This was Indridi Indridason, who had just moved to Reykjavik and was at that time living with them. As soon as Indridi sat at the table it shook and moved violently; he became afraid and wanted to run away. Fortunately he continued and soon developed automatic writing, then trance-speech and various physical phenomena followed. After this increase in phenomena, the group held sittings more frequently and became much larger. It impressed Kvaran that Indridi seemed not to make erroneous statements as the girl had done.

## THE LIFE AND PSYCHICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDRIDI INDRIDASON



*Figure 1. Portrait of Indridi Indridason.*

Indridi Indridason was born on October 12th 1883 as the son of a farmer at Hvolur in Skardsströnd in north-western Iceland. At this time there were no roads in the country, only tracks for horses. It was three days' horse ride to Reykjavik. Indridi<sup>1</sup> moved to Reykjavik at the age of 22 to become a printer's apprentice. He received minimal obligatory education from travelling teachers who visited every farm for a few months to teach children to read and write. Two members of his larger family had received higher education: Konrad Gislason (1808–1891) was a brother of Indridi's grandfather who became professor of Nordic literature at the University of Copenhagen, and was Indridi's chief

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<sup>1</sup> I will from now on refer to him by his first name as is the custom in Iceland.

control after he started to fall in trance; the other was Indridi Einarsson (1851–1939) mentioned above, who was a prominent playwright and held a leading position with the Governor of Iceland while the country was still under Danish rule.



*Figure 2. Einar Kvaran, editor and writer.*

At the end of 1905 Indridi moved to Kvaran's home, and many séances were held there with him in deep trance. A period of activity started involving movements of objects, levitations of Indridi, light and voice phenomena, which lasted with minor intervals until the summer of 1909 when Indridi went with his fiancé to visit his parents. They both caught typhoid fever, from which she died and he never recovered, developing tuberculosis and dying in a sanatorium on August 31, 1912 when still only 28 years old.

Indridi was described as a handsome man, jovial and sociable, intelligent, very friendly, but somewhat changeable and not always easy

to deal with. He liked horses and singing and became a member of the choir at the cathedral in Reykjavik. During his five years as a medium he became a celebrity in Iceland, greatly admired by those who knew of his exceptional gifts but also fiercely criticized and slandered by opponents, particularly those of narrow religious views who saw the Devil acting through him. Little is known about any psychic ability Indridi may have had before his mediumistic abilities were discovered, though it has been claimed that he had had "some remarkable visionary experiences" and that he claimed to have seen deceased people. One instance is given where he identified from seven photographs a deceased man he had not seen before (Nielsson, 1924, p. 165).



*Figure 3. Haraldur Nielsson, Professor of Theology.*

## THE EXPERIMENTAL SOCIETY

The Experimental Society was founded to investigate Indridi's mediumistic abilities shortly after they were discovered. Its leading members were academics and influential members of Reykjavik society, among them Einar H. Kvaran, who was the Society's President, Haraldur Nielsson, Professor of Theology at the University of Iceland, and Björn Jonsson, newspaper editor and later Prime Minister after home rule was established in Iceland. The Experimental Society had a house specially designed and built for its meetings with an apartment for Indridi to live in. In the main hall up to a hundred persons could be seated in rows (for the design see Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1989). The hall was often full and the séances very well attended and only open to members or invited guests. An agreement was made with Indridi that he would hold meetings only for the Society and in return he was given monthly pay. The Society kept Minute Books of the séances. They were written immediately afterwards or the following day, mostly by Nielsson, and usually checked and signed by a second person who had been present.

Kvaran and Nielsson wrote several papers about Indridi's mediumship and the phenomena they observed, for which they seem to have consulted the Minute Books. Haraldur Nielsson reported on Indridi's physical phenomena and mediumship at the First International Congress for Psychical Research in Copenhagen in 1921 (Nielsson, 1922). At the Second Congress in Warsaw in 1923 Nielsson reported on violent poltergeist phenomena around Indridi, much of which took place in full light and involved violent levitations of Indridi and those who tried to protect him from attacks. One night these attacks, such as hurling of objects at Indridi and throwing him around, became so violent that he and his two protectors had to flee the apartment in the Experimental House (Nielsson, 1924).

The Experimental Society came under criticism for being exclusive although they soon had about seventy members. They always emphasised that they were an investigating and not a spiritistic society. Around this time the Society received a request from Dr Gudmundur Hannesson (Figure 4) to investigate the phenomena. He was given permission on the condition that his investigation would last a whole winter. Hannesson was appointed Professor of Medicine at the University of Iceland two years later. He was an active and outstanding scientist who in his life received many honours in Iceland and abroad. He was known for his scepticism about reports of psychical phenomena. He imposed strict controls, isolated the medium from the sitters by a net fixed across the hall where the medium was seated and constantly held

by one or two persons. He placed phosphorous material on various objects that sometimes moved around in the room, sometimes lit a light, and so on. Hannesson gave a thorough description of his investigation in Icelandic in 1910–11, which was later translated into English and appeared in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* in 1924 along with an introduction by Nielsson (Hannesson, 1924). This and other important documents related to the mediumship of Indridi are available for inspection at the home page of the author at [www.hi.is/~erlendur](http://www.hi.is/~erlendur).



*Figure 4. Gudmundur Hannesson, Professor of Medicine.*



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## BRIEF REVIEW OF INDRIDI INDRIDASON'S PHENOMENA

The phenomena observed around Indridi started at the beginning of 1905 with strong table movements, automatic writing and trance-speech in which the first controls and direct communicators appeared. The séances were held in darkness with a glimmer of light from a heating stove or a small red light. After the summer of 1905 movements and levitations of objects continued. For example, a table would levitate without anyone touching it, and on another occasion the sitters were unable to thrust a levitated table down with their hands. Knocks and bangs on walls and floor and in mid-air were common. There were levitations of the medium. The sitters were often touched by invisible hands with the medium being held some distance from them. At this time the first light phenomena appeared, such as self-luminous flashing lights, or light spots in the air or on the walls of the séance room.

Indridi Indridason is primarily known for *physical phenomena*. There follows a brief list of observations reported at the séances and some that occurred outside formal séances (reported in and outside the Minute Books).

*Raps, cracking sounds in the air*, knocks responding to the sitters' demand, some of them loud and heavy, and knocks heard on the medium himself.

*Gusts of wind*, cold or hot, were common, strong enough to blow paper, sometimes far away from the medium, and sometimes as if someone was blowing.

*Odour phenomena* sometimes occurred; sudden fragrance in the presence of the medium, sometimes other smells, as of seaweed. Odour would sometimes cling to a sitter after being touched by the medium.

*Movements and levitations* were frequent, of objects, small and large, light and heavy, and over short or long distances within a room or hall and sometimes quite high. Some of these objects moved as if thrown forcefully, at other times their trajectories were irregular. Sometimes objects were found to tremble. Curtains were pulled back and forth on request.

*Levitations of the medium*. Many levitations are reported, often with the medium holding onto another person. During violent poltergeist phenomena the medium was dragged along the floor and thrown up into the air so that his protectors had difficulty pushing him down (Nielsson, 1924; Thordarson, 1942).

*Playing of musical instruments* as if by invisible hands, and sometimes while they were levitating and moving around in mid-air. Winding of a musical box by itself.

*Fixation of objects.* Sitters could not move objects or stop them moving or thrust them down when they were above the ground. The sitters could not move the medium or his limbs.

*Light phenomena.* Fire-flashes or fire-balls, small and large fire-flashes on the walls. Luminous clouds as large as several feet, sometimes described as a "pillar of light" (Thordarson, 1942, p.99) within which a human form appeared.

*Materialisations.* Shadow or shape of apparently materialised fingers are seen, or of a hand or a foot, or a full human figure. Sitters touch materialised fingers, limbs or trunks that were felt as solid. Once a monster-like animal (mixture of horse and a calf) was observed outside a séance (Haraldsson, 2009).

*Dematerialisation* of the medium's arm. The medium's shoulder and trunk was inspected through touch by several sitters.

*Sense of being touched,* pulled and punched by invisible hands, also being kissed.

*Sounds heard outside the medium;* laughter, footsteps, buzzing sounds, clatter of hoof-beats and rustling noise of clothes as if someone was moving.

*Direct voices.* Whispers were heard, voices spoke, also through trumpets moving through the air. Voices were heard singing, also a male and female voice at the same time. A choir was heard in the distance.

*Direct writing.* Writing appeared on paper without human touch.

*Two or more phenomena occurred simultaneously,* which was deemed impossible for one man to do, such as a musical instrument moving fast around in mid-air and at the same time being played upon, or two widely different voices singing at the same time.

*Automatic writing.* Then Indridi's handwriting would change greatly.

*Mental phenomena* were also reported; that is, information was communicated that was not available to any of the sitters by normal means. The core of this paper will deal with one such case, when a fire in Copenhagen was described at a time when there were no telephone or radio contacts with Iceland.

*Controls and direct communicators revealed knowledge* that the medium could not have known about then.

## REMOTE DESCRIPTION OF A FIRE IN COPENHAGEN

On November 24th 1905 a new communicator appeared. None of the sitters recognized him so he falls into the category of a drop-in communicator (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975). He spoke Danish and introduced himself as 'Mr Jensen' which is a common Danish surname. At this time a break was made for the medium to rest, as he had complained of being tired. It seems that the séances often lasted a long time—one is reported of five hours' duration. When this séance was resumed later in the evening Jensen returned. He stated that he had been to Copenhagen and described a fire raging in a factory in one of the streets there. Copenhagen is over 1300 miles from Reykjavik.

### Accounts of Witnesses

Three witnesses, who were present at the séance on November 24th 1905, have given written accounts of the incident in which 'Jensen' described a fire in Copenhagen. Nielsson (1922, p.456) writes:—

The first evening he [Mr Jensen] manifested himself through the medium, he told us that in the half-hour pause while the medium was being allowed to rest in the middle of the sitting, he had set off for Copenhagen and had seen that a factory was on fire in one of the streets of the city. He told us that the firemen had succeeded in conquering the fire. At that time no telegraphic connection between Iceland and the outside world had been established, so there were no means of recognising that event.

This happened on 24th November 1905. Next day I went to see the Bishop of Iceland, the Right Reverend Hallgrímur Sveinsson, who was my uncle, and stated to him what Jensen had told us, and asked him to write it down and be a witness, whether it proved true or not. At Christmas the next boat came from Denmark, and my uncle looked with curiosity through the Danish paper, *Politiken*, and to his great content, observed the description of the fire. Both day and time were right. About the factory Jensen was also right. It was a lamp factory in 63, Store Kongensgade [a major street in Copenhagen].

Kvaran (1910, p.46) gave a more detailed account in a lecture given at the Danish Metapsychical Society in Copenhagen in 1910 and spoke about when Jensen appeared for the first time:—

This your countryman whom we have come to like so much, presented himself for the first time as he appeared through the medium in a very distinct and elegant manner. He [Jensen] told us that he had come directly from Copenhagen, and that there was a fire there: a factory was burning. The time was about 9 o'clock when he came. Then he disappeared and came back an hour later. Then they [the firemen] had conquered the fire, he said. We did not have any telegraph at that time, so we had to wait to have this statement verified. But we wrote down his account and kept the document with the Bishop [who had taken part in earlier séances]. With the next ship [from

Copenhagen], the papers brought us the news that there had been a large fire in Copenhagen that evening—in Store Kongensgade, I think it was—where amongst other things a factory had burnt. It also said that at about 12 o'clock the fire had been brought under control. As you know, the time is about 12 o'clock here in Copenhagen when it is 10 o'clock in Reykjavik.

[Author's translation from Danish]

There are some differences between the accounts of Nielsson and Kvaran. Nielsson mentions that in the half-hour pause to rest the medium Jensen told them he had set off for Copenhagen and observed a fire. Kvaran writes that about 9 o'clock Jensen appeared and said that he came directly from Copenhagen and that there was a fire there in a factory. Then he disappeared and came back an hour later. These differences need not be a contradiction as they may only have had a half-hour pause but still Jensen did not return until after an hour. Nielsson writes that he went to the Bishop and asked him to write down a description of the event and be a witness. Kvaran writes (1910, p. 46) "we wrote down this account and kept the document with the Bishop". These are minor discrepancies and not of much consequence.

A third witness, Mrs Kvaran, reports that the Bishop of Iceland was chosen to keep a written document about Jensen's statements about the fire until the next ship would arrive from Copenhagen as he was known to subscribe to *Politiken*, the leading Danish newspaper (Thordarson, 1942, p. 102). It was expected that a fire of any consequence in Copenhagen would be reported in *Politiken*.

We only have testimony from these three witnesses, but undoubtedly there were many more. Exactly how many attended on November 24th is nowhere stated, but there usually were a few dozen sitters at the séances of the Experimental Society and numbers ranged from thirty to seventy.

To sum up, Jensen did not only say that there was a fire that evening in Copenhagen. He also made three quite specific statements:—

1. The fire was in a factory.
2. The fire started around midnight on 24 November 1905.
3. The fire was brought under control within an hour.

Let us now examine how these statements fit the facts as they were reported by the Fire Brigade and the newspapers.

On the day following the séance, Saturday 25th November, the two main Danish newspapers report a major fire in Copenhagen. The text of *Politiken* follows in an English translation by the author:—

The Fire in Danish Newspapers



Figure 5. Politiken's report on the fire in Copenhagen on November 24th 1905.

Factory Fire in St. Kongensgade

Copenhagen's Lamp and Chandelier Factory in Flames

Last night at about 12 o'clock the janitor of number 63 Store Kongensgade discovered that there was fire in "Copenhagen's Lamp and Chandelier Factory", which is located on the ground and first floor of a sidehouse in the back yard.

He called the Fire Brigade and soon fire-extinguishing carriages from Adelsgade Fire Station and the main Fire Station arrived under the direction of Fire Chief Bentzen. The first floor was already ablaze with powerful flames reaching out of the windows and breaking the glass in the windows on the second floor where there is a factory for making cardboard boxes.

The Fire Brigade quickly attached two hoses to fire hydrants. One of the hoses had to go across the street so all tram traffic came to a halt. The water from the two hoses soon subdued the fire but then it was discovered that the fire had gone through the ceilings to the floors above the factory . . . [There follows a detailed description of the work of the fire brigade]. In about half an hour the fire had been diminished to such an extent that the firemen could remove the hoses across the street to let about a dozen trams pass that had been waiting, after which the hoses were connected again . . . It became obvious that the fire had caused quite substantial damage. Walls and floors had been burnt out and both stocks and machines of considerable value had been destroyed. There was still fire in some places . . . Around 1 a.m. some of the firemen and equipment were able to leave but a fairly large number of firemen had to remain at the location for a further hour and a half. The fire is assumed to have started by a breakdown in an electric circuit.

Denmark's second-largest newspaper, *Berlingske Tidende*, gives a shorter report:—

Last night at around twelve o'clock the Fire Brigade was called to Store Kongensgade 63, where fire had broken out in a house in the backyard in the warehouse of the Copenhagen Lamp Factory. The fire had spread considerably when the fire brigades arrived from the Main Fire Station and Adelsgade Station. Still, the firemen managed to get the fire under control in about an hour. The damage was substantial.

### Report of the Fire Brigade

In the City Archive of Copenhagen the author found the report (Nr. 273) of the Fire Brigade on the fire in Store Kongensgade 63 handwritten and signed by Fire Chief Bentzen on 25th November 1905. In those days telephones were rare so someone had to run to the next fire alarm, which stood at Dronningens Tvaergade number 31, which is about 320 yards (about five minutes' walk) from Store Kongensgade 63. The fire was thus reported at 11.52.

This report of the Fire Brigade is much shorter than *Politiken's* and Bentzen's handwriting is hard to decipher in some places. It states that the fire was violent. In the house were three workshops of a lamp factory, two of them for packing with much flammable material. The fire had been fully extinguished at 02:00. After clearing the site the Fire Chief left around 03:00 and the rest of the team at 03:55. At 04:27 they were called again in response to fire alarm 47 because the fire had flared up again. Some firemen and equipment were sent, and by 06:00 they had completed their work. The cause of fire is unknown.

Alt tilhøge Kl. 11 2		Brandskilling	
Lobe-Nr. 773			
Gade	St. Høngsgade Nr. 63	Aarsag	Udbrudt
Bygning	2. Etage		
Anmeldt af	Anders Mathiasen, komm. for Anders Mathiasen, komm. for		
	pas Station 4 Kl. 11 2	Omfang	1. Etage af bygning 2. Etage af bygning
Alarmet	ved mundtlig Melding Brandalarm Nr. 58/77 Telefon Nr.		
Iden dæmpet	Kl. 11 2		
	ved Bøboerne Spande		
Antal Strømkær + Brug	fra Haandprojektor 1 Brandhane 2 Stationsprojektor Dampprojektor		
Fl. skade- korning	Brandfolk Andre		
Opfyldningen endt Kl. 11 2			
Alt tilhøge Kl.			

Figure 6. Report of the Fire Brigade on the fire in Store Kongensgade 63.

Nielsson gives no exact time for Jensen's statements about the fire, only that they occurred during a pause for the medium to rest, which would presumably have been late in the séance which took place on Friday evening. The sittings started at eight and lasted up to a few hours. One five-hour sitting is reported. Kvaran writes that it was around nine when Jensen told them about the fire, and then an hour later that the fire had been brought under control. The time in Copenhagen would then have been 11.15, as the time difference between Reykjavik and Copenhagen was two hours and fifteen minutes at this time.

According to the Fire Brigade they were called at 11.52 (9.37 Icelandic time). The fire may have been going for a while before it was noticed and then it took a few minutes for someone to run to the next fire alarm. Kvaran's statement about the timing when Jensen spoke of the fire must be an estimate and our records indicate that the fire is likely to have started sometime after nine. Here, then, we find a reasonably close correspondence.

The fire was brought under control in half an hour according to *Politiken*, and one hour according to *Berlingske Tidende*. Kvaran's



timing comes quite close as he writes that Jensen came back after one hour and claimed that the fire was under control.



Figure 7. Aerial map of Copenhagen, showing Store Kongensgade 63 (A) and Fredriciagade 16 where Emil Jensen died (1). Amaliégade is in the upper right corner, Dronningens Tvaergade on the lower left and Gothersgade at the bottom left.

When considering the nature of this case an important question inevitably arises. How frequent were newsworthy fires in Copenhagen at the beginning of the 20th century? Is it just a fluke of chance that this fire and Jensen's statements took place at the same time? The author checked this possibility by examining the frequency of fires reported in *Politiken*. In a four-week sampling period from two weeks before the fire in Store Kongensgade to two weeks afterwards, four fires were reported in *Politiken*, including the fire in Store Kongensgade. According to our sources Jensen reported the fire in the late evening Icelandic time, a little before midnight Danish time. In the four weeks period only the Store Kongensgade fire started at this time. One fire took place in the late morning and two started in the early evening, at 6.45 p.m. and 7.16 p.m. Danish time respectively.

In the four-week period only one fire took place in a factory, namely the Store Kongensgade fire. The factory fire gets more coverage in

*Politiken* than any other fire during these four weeks; it was the largest fire, and caused most damage, while the other fires were minor and quickly extinguished.

We can conclude that Jensen not only gets it right that a fire took place in Copenhagen on 24th November 1905, but also that it started late in the evening Icelandic time. He correctly states that the fire was under control in about an hour. He correctly identifies the fire as in a factory. These are four features of the fire that Jensen mentions. The author has found no report of Jensen describing events happening far away on other occasions.

### Potential Normal Explanations

Could there be a normal explanation for the fact that Jensen—or for that matter Indridi—described in real time a fire that was taking place some 1300 miles away? Telephones did not come to Reykjavik until almost a year later, and telegraphy not until 1918. The only conceivable explanation that the author has been able to come up with is that Indridi had a confederate in Copenhagen who set the fire in the factory at a predetermined date and time. He and Indridi would have had to agree upon this several weeks, if not months, earlier, for communication with Iceland in the winter was limited to about one ship sailing to Copenhagen per month. Furthermore, the confederate would have to see to it that the fire was extinguished within an hour. Both of them risked that it might turn into a major conflagration, possibly with casualties, for the location was densely populated. If they had been caught he and Indridi would have faced many years in prison. It seems reasonable, then, to reject this explanation—besides which there is not a trace of evidence to support it. Furthermore, *Politiken* writes that the fire was caused by electric failure; the Fire Brigade lists the cause as unknown. If there had been suspicion of arson it would have been reported to the police for investigation. Police records for this period reveal no such charge.

Are there any other normal possibilities? What about a carrier-pigeon? The problem is the long distance. It takes a commercial aeroplane about three hours to reach Iceland from Copenhagen, usually against a westerly wind. 1300 miles is beyond the flying capacity of a pigeon and most of the journey is over open sea. Also, there is no indication that Indridi kept doves. He kept a horse.

### **Comparison With Swedenborg's Description of the Fire in Stockholm**

Indridi/Jensen's description of the fire in Copenhagen is strikingly similar to Emanuel Swedenborg's (1688–1772) vision of the great fire in Stockholm in 1759. But there are also some important differences. The Swedish scientist and seer is reported to have described a fire that raged in Stockholm during his visit to Gothenburg (Broad, 1950, 1969; Haraldsson & Gerding, 2010). The case apparently became well known, so the German philosopher Immanuel Kant asked an English friend, whom he held in high esteem, to investigate this case along with three other cases. His friend, who is not identified by name, was a merchant who sometimes visited Gothenburg and Stockholm. His report to Kant is lost but Kant describes this famous case in a letter dated 10th August 1763, to a friend who asked him about the case, Miss Charlotte von Knobloch. The relevant passage reads as follows:—

The following occurrence appears to me to have the greatest weight of proof, and to place the assertion respecting Swedenborg's extraordinary gift beyond all possibility of doubt. In the year 1759, towards the end of September, on Saturday at four o'clock p.m. Swedenborg arrived at Gothenburg from England when Mr. William Castel invited him to his house, together with a party of fifteen persons. About six o'clock, Swedenborg went out [not stated if out of the house or only out of the room], and returned to the company quite pale and alarmed. He said that a dangerous fire had just broken out in Stockholm, at the Södermalm, and that it was spreading fast. He was restless and went out often. He said that the house of one of his friends, whom he named, was already in ashes, and that his own was in danger. At eight o'clock, after he had been out again, he joyfully exclaimed, "Thank God! The fire is extinguished three doors from my house." The news occasioned great commotion throughout the whole city, but particularly amongst the company in which he was. It was announced to the Governor the same evening. On Sunday morning, Swedenborg was summoned to the Governor, who questioned him concerning the disaster. Swedenborg described the fire precisely, how it had begun, and in what manner it had ceased, and how long it had continued. On the same day the news spread throughout the city, and as the Governor had thought it worthy of attention, the consternation was considerably increased; because many were in trouble on account of their friends and property, which might have been involved in the disaster.

On Monday evening a messenger arrived in Gothenburg who was sent by the Board of Trade at the time of the fire. In the letter brought by him, the fire was described precisely in the manner stated by Swedenborg. On Tuesday morning the royal courier arrived at the Governor's with the sad news of the fire, the loss which it had occasioned, and houses it had damaged or ruined, not in the least differing from that which Swedenborg had given at the time when it happened, for the fire was extinguished at eight o'clock.

[English translation from Trobridge, 2004, pp. 228–229]

News arriving in Gothenburg with a messenger from Stockholm verified Swedenborg's description in the same way as Indridason/Jensen's account was confirmed when the next ship brought a *Politiken* to Reykjavik. In both instances normal communication of any kind was not possible. The fire in Södermalm in Stockholm was described in the newspaper *Stockholms Posttidningar* on 23 July 1759, and in the Gothenburg newspaper *Hvad Nytt i Staden* on 30 July. This was the largest fire in Stockholm for many years, and destroyed some 250 houses. It was far more destructive than the fire in Copenhagen.

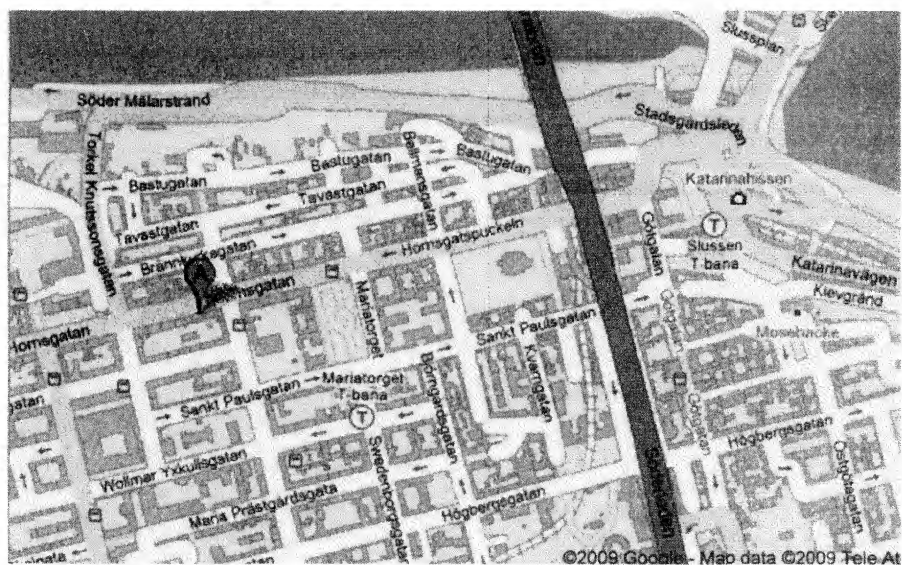


Figure 8. Aerial map of Stockholm. The map shows where Swedenborg lived on Södermalm in Stockholm (A). The fire started near Stadsgårdsleden on the upper right side and stopped between Mariatorget and Swedenborg's home on Hornsgatan (A). Notice Swedenborgsgatan low in the centre.

The fire started about half a mile away from Swedenborg's home, and was extinguished less than 300 feet from his house, which stood where Hornsgatan 41–43 is now. This distance is known because Maria Church, which is very close by, was burned down. Where it stood is now a public park.

The date given for the fire in Kant's letter differs about a month from the actual date as reported in the newspapers. The Cambridge philosopher and former President of the Society for Psychical Research, C. D. Broad (1950, 1969), wrote an excellent paper on the case, its strength and weaknesses, which was published as a *Proceedings of the SPR* in 1950. Another former President of the SPR, John Poynton (2004, pp. 262–268),

has written an interesting essay review on a recently published book on Kant and psychical research.

The author made an attempt to improve upon Broad's findings by searching in archives and libraries in Gothenburg (with the help of Adrian Parker) and Stockholm and by meeting with Swedish experts on Swedenborg, such as Inge Jonsson, former Rector of Stockholm University, and Revd Olle Hjern of the Swedenborg Church in Sweden. No new documents were found or have been found for a long time.

There are some obvious similarities between the cases of Indridi/Jensen and Swedenborg. Both men tell of two or more observations of the fire with some time in between. In their last observation both report that the fire has been brought under control. In both instances many observers were present, fifteen with Swedenborg and presumably many sitters with Indridi, with their exact number not given. Those present were in both cases so impressed that they selected two highly placed individuals to be witnesses, the Bishop of Iceland and the Governor of Gothenburg. Both groups waited for the news to arrive, from Copenhagen, over 1300 miles away, and from Stockholm, which is 245 miles from Gothenburg.

The location of the fires must in both cases obviously have been of utmost importance to both percipients (assuming that discarnate Jensen was the percipient). In Swedenborg's case the fire threatened his home and property. In Jensen's case the fire took place very close to houses where he had lived during his lifetime, in fact all his life, and where he must have had many close friends.

The two cases also differ in important ways. Indridi was in trance and one of his communicators described the fire. Swedenborg was apparently in his normal state of consciousness. We should, however, take notice of that Swedenborg wanted to be alone and undisturbed as he went outside to have his impressions of the fire. Perhaps he had to go into some altered state of consciousness, when he may presumably have communicated with deceased spirits in which case we come close to the situation of Indridason.

Alternatively, could this be a case of telepathy by Swedenborg? We do not know if anyone was living in Swedenborg's house when he was away. Like Jensen, Swedenborg never married, so perhaps it is more likely that no one was in the house who became aware of the approaching fire and thought of Swedenborg. Obviously, he had neighbours but they were probably more concerned with their own property than his. This makes the telepathy interpretation not very likely, but there is no way to decide what kind of perception this might have been, such as clairvoyance or telepathy, if it was Swedenborg's own perception. What we know for sure is his reputation in later life was for communicating with spirits of the deceased.

Swedenborg might be considered a forerunner of the spiritualistic movement. He had considerable influence, particularly in the United States and in Great Britain, where churches were founded in his name which still exist. In the United States his writings became well known, and have been repeatedly published up to the present day. He influenced such persons as William James, whose father was a Swedenborgian.

### **The Discovery of the Minute Books**

The Minute Books of The Experimental Society had been lost for over half a century when two of them turned up in the estate of the aged widow of a former President of the Icelandic SPR, Revd Jon Auduns. This was some two years after the publication of Gissurarson and Haraldsson's monograph on Indridi in 1989. The two Minute Books cover the period from December 4th 1905 to January 6th 1906, and from September 9th 1907 to March 1908, and a few other séances. They cover about seven months, which is approximately one-sixth of the time when Indridi was active as a medium, when we consider the break that was made for about three months every summer. Some of the Minutes are fairly detailed, with descriptions of sittings consisting of about 2–3 handwritten pages on folio-sized paper, while others are simply summary and of little value. The Minute Books are now kept in the manuscript section of the National Library in Reykjavik.

The Minute Books give further insight into the séances at The Experimental Society. They describe over sixty séances and give us a unique account of remarkable physical as well as mental phenomena, and about the persons involved, Indridi's controls and the direct communicators. It was not until 2008 that the author took a careful look at the Minutes, and made an unexpected discovery, perhaps the most memorable finding in his life.

### **The Search for Jensen's Identity**

Who was that mysterious Jensen? Was he just a figment in the mind of Indridi or had he ever been a real living person? The only information given in the account of Nielsson (1922) is that Jensen was a manufacturer [fabrikant]. Kvaran (1910) describes him as a clothing manufacturer [klædefabrikant] and a native of Copenhagen which, he writes, was easily judged from his "genuine Copenhagen accent". That is all we know from those who wrote about Indridi and his phenomena. Kvaran (1934) wrote about Jensen, "never did we come to know anything about who he was when he was living". After Jensen's first appearance on November 24th Jensen appeared frequently associated with the light phenomena and attempts to produce materialisations. However, not a word is found about his person or his corporeal identity.

Unexpectedly the newly-turned-up Minute Books reveal interesting details about Jensen. They start with a sitting on 4th December 1905, ten days after the sitting in which the fire in Copenhagen was described. According to the Minutes Jensen appears again at a sitting on December 11th 1905. Then he makes several highly specific statements about his life.

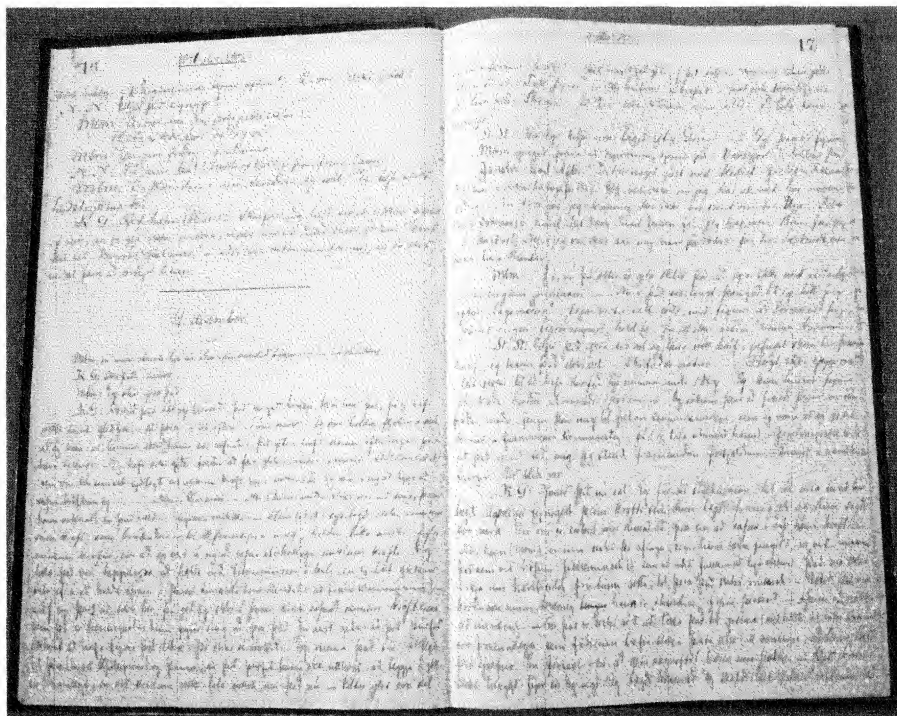


Figure 9. Minutes Book of 11 December 1905.

Apparently in response to being asked, Jensen says that his Christian name is Emil, and he gives other details regarding his personal life. The exact Danish text reads as follows:—

Det (mit Döbsnavn) er Emil. Mit Navn: Emil Jensen, ja! Jeg har ikke Børn. Ja, (jeg var Ungkarl). Nej, (jeg var ikke saa ung naar jeg døde). Jeg har Sökende, men ikke her i Himlen.

In the author's translation:—

It (my Christian name) is Emil. My name: Emil Jensen, yes! I have no children. Yes, (I was a bachelor). No, (I was not so young when I died). I have siblings, but not here in heaven.

After these statements the medium greets someone and speaks of eating beans (Icelanders sometimes jokingly referred to Danes as bean-eaters). Then he moans and screams in pain and says, do not do it, do



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not do it. The Minutes continue, “very bright lights on and off, a man appears in one of them”. This is not described further. Kvaran and Nielsson mention that the light phenomena caused much pain to the medium.

Apparently no attempt was ever made to verify if any person had lived in Copenhagen who fitted the description that was given on that occasion. We can only speculate about the reasons for this. Copenhagen is far away from Reykjavik and required a major sea voyage to reach. Also, Copenhagen was at this time a major city and it might not have seemed feasible to trace someone who might have lived an undeterminable time ago and carried a very common name. Were these few sentences in the Minute Book simply quickly forgotten and never looked up again? Or, were the sitters already at this time so convinced through prior experience that everything that came from Indridi was so solid that it needed no verification?

Fam. No. 1860		Fam. No. 1860		Fam. No. 1860		Fam. No. 1860		Fam. No. 1860	
Age	Sex	Name	Profession	Age	Sex	Name	Profession	Age	Sex
40	M	Jensen, Peter	Manufacturer	10	F	Jensen, Anna	Wife	10	F
35	M	Jensen, Christian	Manufacturer	5	F	Jensen, Maria	Daughter	5	F
30	M	Jensen, Hans	Manufacturer	0	F	Jensen, Johanne	Daughter	0	F
25	M	Jensen, Lars	Manufacturer	0	F	Jensen, Catharine	Daughter	0	F
20	M	Jensen, Peter	Manufacturer	0	F	Jensen, Johanne	Daughter	0	F
15	M	Jensen, Hans	Manufacturer	0	F	Jensen, Catharine	Daughter	0	F
10	M	Jensen, Lars	Manufacturer	0	F	Jensen, Johanne	Daughter	0	F
5	M	Jensen, Peter	Manufacturer	0	F	Jensen, Catharine	Daughter	0	F
0	M	Jensen, Hans	Manufacturer	0	F	Jensen, Johanne	Daughter	0	F

Figure 10. 1860 Census Record on the Jensen family at St. Kongensgade 40

After more than a century the question remained open; had there lived in Copenhagen any Jensen who was a manufacturer? Or, had there perhaps been several of them? Was there any connection between such a person or persons, if they had ever existed, and the location of the fire

that was described when the communicator Jensen first appeared on November 24th 1905?

In June 2009 the author was able to spend a day in Copenhagen. At the Royal Library there is *Københavns Vejviser*, which was published annually in the 19th century. It lists professionals and business people in alphabetical order according to family name, profession, Christian name and address. The author looked up the volume for 1890.

Jensen is one of the most common surnames in Denmark. Hundreds of Jensens were listed, including several manufacturers of that name, but only one manufacturer had the Christian name Emil. And his address? Store Kongensgade 67, which is two doors away from number 63 where the fire broke out. This seemed to be more than a mere coincidence. It verified that a manufacturer by the name of Emil Jensen had in fact lived in Copenhagen, and—even more remarkably—had lived in Store Kongensgade 67, close to the house where the fire broke out.

Late that year the author searched census documents in the Landsarkiv in Copenhagen. In 1885 Thomas Emil Jensen, single, 37 years old, born in Copenhagen, is listed as manufacturer and coffee merchant. At that time he was living with four single sisters at Store Kongensgade 68, again close to number 63 where the fire broke out. He was head of the household. Five years earlier he had lived at Store Kongensgade 40 where his father ran a business (F. Jensen og Søn) selling spices (urtekræmmer) for some thirty years. In 1880 Emil Jensen had been living with three unmarried sisters and Edvard Julius Jensen, whom later inquiries revealed to be his brother.

The census record of 1860 showed that his parents lived at that time at St. Kongensgade 40 with seven children, four daughters and three sons, Lorenz Ferdinand, Thomas Emil and Edvard Julius. Emil Jensen is last registered in 1898 at Fredriciagade 16, which crosses Store Kongensgade and is only some 300 yards away from the house where the fire broke out. The records show that from the age of eight until his death in 1898 Emil Jensen had lived at Store Kongensgade or in streets crossing Store Kongensgade. See Table 1.

His certificate of burial obtained from the City Archives states that he died on 3rd August 1898, single and at the age of 50, was born in Copenhagen, was a manufacturer by profession. He was buried by his brother, Revd Lorenz Ferdinand, at Assistens Kirkegård (churchyard) in Copenhagen.

Documents in the office of Assistens Kirkegård show that Emil Jensen had been buried in a family grave. His four sisters were buried there after him; Louise Emilie in 1908, Anna Sofie and Lovisa in 1935, and Julie Caroline in 1936.

**Table 1**

**Places where Emil Jensen lived during his lifetime  
according to Census reports and Vejviser i Köbenhavn**

1848–1849	Amaliegade
1854–1855	Amagertorv 1
1856	Store Kongensgade 43
1857–1859	Dronnings Tværgade
1860–1882	Store Kongensgade 40
1883–1885	Store Kongensgade 68
1886–1891	Store Kongensgade 67
1892–1896	Gothersgade 109
1897–1898	Fredriciagade 16

Dronningens Tvaergade, Gothersgade and Fredriciagade  
cross Store Kongensgade and are all in the same neighbourhood.

What about his brother, Edvard Julius Jensen? He was four years younger than Emil. In 1885 he had married and moved to Havnegade 43, and was registered as coffee merchant and chocolate manufacturer. He died in 1923 and thus survived his brother Emil. His older brother Lorenz Ferdinand became a clergyman who served for many years at the Trinitatis Church in the centre of Copenhagen. He died in 1925. A document of the probate court (skifteret), written when Emil Jensen's estate was divided, lists his brothers and sisters, states that he had no children and shows that his siblings were all alive when he died. See Table 2.

**Table 2**

**Verification of the statements given in the Minute Book  
on December 11 1905 about Jensen's identity**

Emil Jensen's statements	Verification
1. My Christian name is Emil.	Various documents
2. I was a bachelor.	Certificate of Burial
3. I have no children.	Probate Court
4. I was not so young when I died.	Certificate of Burial
5. I have siblings.	Census records, Probate Court
6. My siblings are not in heaven (are living).	Probate Court
7. I was a manufacturer.	Various documents

The 'hit-rate' with respect to the identity of Emil Jensen is 100 per cent, as is the description of the fire in Copenhagen which was detailed earlier. The only item that is not perfectly verified is that Kvaran (1910) and Nielsen (1922) state that Jensen was a manufacturer of clothes. Danish documents register him as a manufacturer and coffee merchant. Nowhere is it specified what he manufactured. He seems to have been well off, for he left a considerable estate to his inheritors.

Do we know anything more about Jensen? Military records ('Lægdsrulle' in Landsarkiv in Copenhagen) show that for health reasons he was deemed unfit for military service. The military gives his height at 66½ inches and chest at 29 inches, which shows that he had been a very thin man. His certificate of burial states that he died of cancer of the liver.

Kvaran (1910, p.46) writes that they were told that "Jensen would be the leader in the attempts to produce materialisation phenomena because he had obtained knowledge of such experiments from other places". Whatever is meant here (knowledge from the time Jensen was living or after he died with other mediums) it seemed important to try to know something about the interests and cultural background of Jensen's family apart from their being merchants and manufacturers. For example, did the family have an interest in spiritism that came to Denmark in the 1880s (Kragh, 2002)?

A search for relatives came to a dead end; he and his sisters had no children. His brothers married. The clergyman, Lorenz Ferdinand, had no child, while Edvard Julius had one son, who became a prominent lawyer and married but had no child. The fact that one of the brothers became a clergyman shows that someone in the family had spiritual interests, although this does not imply that he necessarily had any interest in spiritism.

### **Remote Viewing, Travelling Clairvoyance or Spirit-Communication?**

Is this a case of clairvoyance by the medium, an out-of-the-body experience with a perception of a fire in distant Copenhagen, or a case of telepathy? As far as is known, Indridi knew no person in Copenhagen who might have felt the need to think of him at the time of the fire.

Was this a case of spirit-communication? Let us assume for a moment that Jensen existed as a discarnate entity communicating through Indridi. Then we can ask, why should Indridi go to a place to which he had no relationship and had never visited? Let us compare this with reasons Jensen might have had to observe the fire. He may have felt compelled, during a pause from mediumistic work with Indridi, to return to Copenhagen to observe an event that must have been important to him, and many people he knew, as it took place in the

street where he had lived most of his life. Jensen must have had a strong motivation to follow the development of this fire whereas Indridi does not seem to have had any particular motivation to do so.

### **The Role of Jensen in the Mediumship of Indridi Indridason**

First there appeared lights of different kinds, shapes and colours. Already on 6th December 1905 we read in the Minutes, "Much complaint by the medium. Bright shine and light and a dark man in the light (all see it)". On December 7th, "Light is seen and man in it". Only later was it revealed that the man in the light was Jensen, who was responsible for attempts at creating appearances or materializations. He became an important figure in the séances with frequent appearances.

At many sittings Jensen was seen by sitters appearing in a "luminous, beautiful light-pillar", usually very briefly but several times during the same séance and at various locations in the hall. This "pillar of light" would first appear in the darkness, and after that Jensen would appear in it. The "pillar of light" was larger than Jensen and emitted light in such a way that Jensen and Indridi could sometimes be seen side by side at the same time (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1989, pp.82–85). Both of Indridi's hands were at the same time being held by a witness to exclude the possibility of fraud. It is reported that at times, when Jensen was not visible, his hands could be touched, or sitters felt his touch on various parts of their bodies. The Minutes state that the light appearances were painful to the medium, who while in trance could be heard moaning and screaming with pain.

## **DISCUSSION**

The unexpected new finding that Jensen had lived most of his life close to Store Kongensgade 63 adds a striking similarity to the Swedenborg case. The Indridason/Jensen case has the advantage over the Swedenborg one that it is much better documented as there exist first-hand reports of witnesses.

Could there be a normal explanation of the cases? A great advantage of these historical cases over comparable current cases is the impossibility of fraud and/or leakage based on modern communication equipment. The telephone and telegraph had not been invented at the time of the Swedenborg case, and had not been introduced to Iceland at the time of the Indridi/Jensen case. The only potential explanation that one can speculate about is that Swedenborg and Indridason had accomplices who started the fires at predetermined times so that they could impress those around them. This possibility is so absurd that it can safely be excluded.

Regarding the new details about the life of Emil Jensen the situation

is somewhat different. Kaare Claudewitz of Copenhagen suggested that Indridason might have read an obituary of Emil Jensen in a Danish newspaper. We jointly checked this possibility. No obituary of Emil Jensen was found in *Politiken* or *Berlingske Tidende*.

On the other hand Copenhagen was the capital of the Danish kingdom of which Iceland was a part at that time. Konrad Gislason (1808–1891), brother of Indridi's grandfather, had been professor of Old Icelandic/Nordic literature in Copenhagen, and was a prolific and highly respected scholar. He was the chief control in Indridi's mediumship, and lived most of his life in Copenhagen, where he died when Indridi was eight years old. There is no evidence of any contact between the scholar Konrad Gislason and the merchant and manufacturer Emil Jensen.

Jensen spoke Danish at the sittings, "with a typical Copenhagen accent" (Kvaran, 1934). This raises the question of xenoglossy. Indridason received minimal education up in the country where he was brought up. He learned how to write and read but no Danish. After he moved to Reykjavik he is likely to have picked up some common Danish words but unlikely anything beyond that. That this may have been a genuine case of xenoglossy gets some support from the fact that a few other communicators turned up who spoke foreign languages. These two historical cases of Jensen/Indridason and Swedenborg bear witness to extraordinary awareness of events taking place at great distances. Both display the importance of motivational factors as these events were highly relevant to the persons who experienced them. The Indridason case opens up the important question, who is the percipient, the living Indridi or the deceased Jensen? The weight of the motivational factor tips the scale heavily towards the deceased Emil Jensen.

The Jensen/Indridason case not only offers a strikingly convincing evidence for remote extrasensory perception—to use Rhine's terminology—but the motivational factor offers an intriguing argument for Emil Jensen being an independent entity distinct from the person of Indridi Indridason.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Photocopies of relevant documents concerning this case will be posted on the author's home page; [www.hi.is/~erlendur](http://www.hi.is/~erlendur).

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